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JOHN J. BORCHI  
General Manager

## AMERICAN CHARACTER AND CULTURE: SOME 20th CENTURY PERSPECTIVES

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YET until now there was something lacking. Each of the great writers of the past has had something lovable about him, at once broadly human and peculiar to him. His readers could somehow identify with him while still admiring him. Until now, Jean-Paul Sartre has not inspired such an attitude in most readers. *The Words* introduces us into a new intimacy with the father of our new Existentialism and the author of the rather cold dialectical works bearing his name. All at once, we see Sartre as a man.

## Dropout From What?

NAT HENTOFF

COMPULSORY MIS-EDUCATION, by Paul Goodman. *Horizon Press*. \$3.95.

A seventeen-year-old Puerto Rican on New York's lower East Side was explaining recently why he had dropped out of school. "One or two teachers I had gave a damn about me. The rest were too busy or too dragged with what they were doing. And I wasn't learning nothing. Man, I learned more English in the street than I ever did in school."

In one sense, the boy's decision was an act of self-affirmation, a refusal to be conned into a belief that he *was* being educated. In another sense, of course, his decision is all too apt to constrict him to a lifetime of scrabbling for rapidly disap-

pearing low-skilled jobs. For as Paul Goodman mournfully concedes in *Compulsory Mis-Education*, schooling has now become the only route upward.

His analysis focuses not only on the schools' failure to hold and stimulate the "disadvantaged" but also on what he regards as their pervasive failure to educate all classes of youngsters. By education he means simply and reasonably the liberating and strengthening of a youth's initiative so that he can be "useful to society and . . . fulfill his own best powers." It is the latter task, Goodman claims, in which the schools are particularly remiss.

It is difficult to deny Goodman's contention that there is less and less opportunity for "spontaneity" and "free spirit" in an overcrowded school system which, "with its increasingly set curriculum, stricter grading, [and] incredible amounts of testing, is already a vast machine to shape acceptable responses." The scholastically bright compete fiercely for upper-echelon jobs while "the majority—those who are bright but not scholastic, and those who are not especially bright but have other kinds of vitality—are being subdued."

Having been thus educated in a lockstep, those who finish school become part of an adult society in which independent initiative and inventiveness are increasingly limited mainly to "top management and expert advisers." The rest have little pride of achievement in their work, and they experience self-limiting, conformist satisfactions in what they make of their leisure time because they have been compressed into more than vocational molds while still in school.

ONE of Goodman's suggestions to allow individuality to break through is his call for an educational policy that will "allow for periodic quitting and easy return to the scholastic ladder, so that the young have time to find themselves and to study when they are themselves ready." Kingman Brewster, Jr., president of Yale, has suggested that colleges ought to establish a regular program, including financial help, that will permit students to take a year off in order to learn more about them-

selves and the world. As Goodman says, after twelve years of doing assigned lessons for grades, many students need "enough life-experience to be educable on the college level, especially in the social sciences and humanities."

Goodman, moreover, would start the opportunities for periodic quitting in high school. For example, he would allow young people to leave for a time to engage in community service ("working in understaffed hospitals or as school-aides" as well as in rural rehabilitation and conservation). For those not adapted to an academic curriculum, Goodman proposes different kinds of colleges modeled after the Danish Folk-Schools, "where youngsters who have left school to go to work can return between the ages of 18 and 25 to learn oral history, current events, practical science and the politics of science, and to act plays and play music."

But Goodman does not sufficiently focus on what can be done to change the educational values in elementary schools, not only with regard to ways and content of teaching but also in terms of finding and training a new breed of teachers of the young. These would be teachers who agree with Goodman that schooling should have an initiatory and moral meaning and also that while "There is a case for uniform standards of achievement . . . they cannot be reached by uniform techniques."

Nor, it might be added, can these standards be reached for a broad cross-section of children through tightly homogeneous "track" systems by which the scholastically bright are separated, starting in the early school years, from the "slow" children who then proceed to become even slower by acting out a self-fulfilling prophecy.

To recruit and train these teachers and to make classes small enough so that heterogeneous groupings can work for the benefit of all the youngsters requires money. And money is based on politics. The one major weakness of Goodman's book is that he makes his proposals in a political vacuum without specifying how society can be moved to realize just how unviable the present education system is.

"Where the press is free and every man able to read,  
all is safe."  
THOMAS JEFFERSON

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# Our Literary Tocqueville

ROBERT SKLAR

**THE SYMBOLIC MEANING: The Uncollected Versions of *Studies in Classic American Literature*, by D. H. Lawrence. Edited by Armin Arnold. Viking. \$5.**

**PAINTINGS OF D. H. LAWRENCE, edited by Mervyn Levy, with essays by Harry T. Moore, Jack Lindsay, and Herbert Read. Viking. \$12.50.**

Lawrence speaks to Americans in the voice of a prophet as he never has to his own countrymen. Therein lay the appeal of his *Studies in Classic American Literature* when it was rediscovered during the postwar revival of his novels. Lawrence was acclaimed as our great foreign interpreter because despite his irony he liked American writers—and more because he explained them to us in ways we had been too timorous and too involved to see. “If America will accept me and England won’t, I belong to America,” Lawrence had proclaimed from Taos, New Mexico, when he arrived there in 1922. He was already sick of America when he wrote the *Studies* in 1923, but the future was in his blood, and America was the future to him, for good or ill. Now with the first book publication of his early essays on American literature, we can know the reason why.

Five critical years, years beginning in defeat and ending in international fame and success, separate *The Symbolic Meaning* from the later *Studies*. Lawrence first began to study American literature at the lowest point in his career, in 1916, when America seemed a haven of escape. The two great novels on which his reputation now rests were behind him. But *The Rainbow* had been suppressed, and no publisher would then touch *Women in Love*. He thought of setting up a utopian community in Florida or lecturing across the United States. In 1917 and 1918 he prepared a series of essays on American literature, giving them all his imaginative energy at a time when he was at the height of his creative powers. The eight essays that were printed in the *Eng-*

*lish Review* have now been brought together, along with a later essay on Whitman and three essays never published before.

The symbolic language of the classic Americans struck responsive depths in Lawrence. He had already begun, vaguely but passionately, to outline his mature philosophy. Suddenly the American writers dragged him into their dark forests and over their stormy seas. Lawrence was a dualist, a polarizer, but he saw in his reading of the Americans the possibility of a liberating synthesis. In American history and conscious American art he found the culminating experience of western civilization, the triumph of mind and will, the turning of men into machines. But in the deepest symbolic undertones of American literature he caught the glimmerings of a “mystic transubstantiation,” a new flowering forth of men into natural being. From Franklin and Crèvecoeur he moved to Cooper, and there in Natty Bumppo of the Leatherstocking novels he saw the final consummation of the white race’s consciousness, “the flower which burns down to mould, to liberate the new seed.” Through Poe and Hawthorne and Dana he came to Melville, of whom he was the first important rediscoverer. *Moby-Dick*, the white whale, was the “deep, free sacral consciousness” western man sought unsuccessfully to destroy. And in Whitman, “the greatest of the Americans” despite his faults, Lawrence found the language and vision of an emerging sense of new being for mankind. “The whole being is there, sensually throbbing, spiritually quivering, mentally, ideally speaking. . . . It is perfect and whole.” Beyond the final willful mechanization of life opened a new field of living.

When Lawrence came to revise the American essays in Taos, he dropped the slow, reasoned perceptions of his desperate years. Instead he wrote in a clipped, forceful style and ironic humor that reflect his success, his certainty, his confidence, and his disgust with life in Taos. “Lucky Coleridge, who got no farther than Bristol. Some of us have gone all the way.” Still, *Studies in Classic American Literature* remains our literary Tocqueville. The early

essays make neither a better nor a more important book. But for the insights it can give new readers into Lawrence and the American classics, *The Symbolic Meaning* is an exceptional and indispensable book.

**L**IKE WHITMAN, whom he so admired, Lawrence was large, he contained multitudes. His own generation saw him only in brief lightning flashes, and the postwar revival came about by narrowing his range. With the first publication of his collected paintings, one more aspect of his versatile genius reasserts itself.

Ideologically, Lawrence placed himself with Cézanne, whom he called the most important figure in modern art. “He wished to displace our present mode of mental-visual consciousness, the consciousness of mental concepts, and substitute a mode of consciousness that was predominantly intuitive, the awareness of touch,” Lawrence wrote in 1929. “Leave out all your thoughts, all your feelings, all your mind, and all your personality, which we know all about and find boring beyond endurance. Leave it all out—and be an apple!”

Lawrence began to paint seriously only after settling in Italy in 1926. Twenty-six oils and watercolors that he painted in Italy were put on exhibition in London in 1929. The exhibition was closed by the police, and thirteen paintings were seized as evidence for a prosecution under the Obscenity Act, though an agreement that no further exhibitions should be held in England secured their release. A volume of the paintings in the exhibit was published in a limited edition in 1929, and now they are brought together with his youthful landscapes in *Paintings of D. H. Lawrence*.

“Not immortal, not masterpieces, not ‘great,’ not even ‘lovely,’” Sir Herbert Read writes in his essay in the volume, “but these paintings will not die so soon as Lawrence himself might have wished.” Some are crude or overly didactic, but in others the drama and prophecy and richness of his vision are conveyed in an almost mystical way. They represent Lawrence’s desire to create in all forms of art his vision of human vitality.